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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KATHMANDU 002245

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SA/INS, SA/RA, DS/IP/SA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/24/2012

TAGS: [MASS](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [KPAO](#) [CASC](#) [NP](#)

SUBJECT: U.S. ARMS SALES TO NEPALI ARMY MAKES FRONT-PAGE NEWS

REF: KATHMANDU 2171

Classified By: DCM ROBERT K. BOGGS. REASON: 1.5 (B,D).

1. (SBU) Reports on U.S. sales of M-16 rifles to the Royal Nepal Army (RNA) appeared on the front pages of the November 23 editions of leading newspapers. Disclosure of this information, apparently leaked by the RNA itself, follows a November 15 Maoist statement claiming responsibility for the killings of two Embassy guards and warning that diplomatic missions working against the Maoists "will not be spared by our party." Suggested press guidance follows in Para 4 below. End summary.

2. (U) On November 23, the Kathmandu Post, the largest-circulation English daily, and its vernacular counterpart, Kantipur, ran front-page reports on U.S. sales of M-16 rifles to the Royal Nepal Army (RNA). The story, quoting unidentified "RNA sources," reported RNA plans over the next three years to provide every soldier with an M-16. (Note: A statement in the fourth paragraph of the story, alleging that a first tranche of 5,000 of the weapons were received in August, is incorrect. No weapons have yet been received by the RNA. End note.) The RNA decision to purchase the rifles is explicitly linked to "escalating Maoist violence."

3. (C) Comment: Until now, the Embassy has successfully deflected specific queries from the public and the press about details of our security assistance to the Government of Nepal and the RNA. It will be difficult for us to continue to do so, at least with respect to our sales of M-16s. Delivery of the first 1,500 may take place as early as December, with the balance of the delivery in March. The story follows a November 15 press release from the Maoists claiming responsibility for the slayings of two U.S. Embassy guards (both Nepali) on December 15, 2001, and on November 9, 2002 (Reftel). The press release sparked concern because of its explicit warning that members of the U.S. and other diplomatic missions "working against the Maoist party or . . . to destroy the people's war . . . will not be spared by our party. . . . We do not have the policy of fighting against them unless they come to fight with us." We suspect the Maoists may well have known the rifles were coming, although information about exact numbers and delivery dates may have been sketchy. Now that the story is out, we think it is important that it be couched in a manner that the USG policy decision to expand its military-to-military relationship with Nepal be linked publicly to Maoist terror. At the same time, we plan to emphasize the unprecedented levels of our development assistance and note that the arms sales in no way undercut our previously stated support for a negotiated resolution to the conflict.

4. (SBU) Begin text of suggested, if-asked press guidance:

IF ASKED ABOUT WEAPONS SALES:

--The USG has agreed to sell M-16 rifles to the Royal Nepal Army. We have provided such rifles in the past for international peacekeeping.

--This agreement follows a USG policy decision to support the Government of Nepal in its fight against Maoist terror and violence against innocent civilians. This violence has obstructed international development programs--including decades of US assistance--and severely undermined Nepal's economic growth and social welfare.

--Our security assistance to Nepal has expanded in direct response to the unprecedented expansion of Maoist violence.

--This assistance will include equipment, supplies, and training, with particular emphasis on human rights training for Royal Nepal Army soldiers.

--We know that resolving the insurgency will require more than security assistance. Our government has increased development assistance to Nepal to the unprecedented level of almost USD 38 million--more than double the amount of our security assistance.

--More important than either security or development

assistance from foreign donors is commitment from the government, the insurgents and the Nepali people to finding a peaceful resolution to the conflict that upholds constitutional multi-party democracy.

--We call on the Maoists to cease their campaign of violence and terror and accept the government's call for dialogue.

MALINOWSKI